

If we suppose Intelligence, with an organism answering in its characteristics merely to the properties of the ether, we have a being conforming very nearly, if not quite, to the notion the mystics had of the indwellers of the supersensual world. With bodies more dense than steel, though unamenable to earthly sight or touch, these creatures would see the fleshly forms as a shadowy garment, and a matter at large but as a film thinner than air which offered no bar to their passage. And, exempt from the laws of gravitation which hold prison bound the frame of clay, they might levitate at will, and with the swiftness of light transport themselves from planet to planet. From the sun's flame they could take no harm and even the chill of absolute zero would leave their bodies unscathed.

CHARLES KASSEL in *Immortality and the New Physics*,
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Chapter III: Why Is the Resurrection Judged Incredible?

This question of St. Paul addressed to King Agrippa (Acts 26:8) may well be employed to include a brief, partial statement both of explanations of rejection of the Easter message and of reasons for acceptance of it as true.

Why do some disbelieve the Easter message of the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus as Lord of death and the grave?

One reason is because, as in the days of our Lord, there are those who have adopted a world view which does not permit the belief. The sect of Sadducees denied the resurrection. They went further. "The

Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees confess both” (Acts 23:8). “On that day there came to him Sadducees, they that say there is no resurrection” (Matthew 22:23).

Paul addressed the representative of another type of present-day unbeliever in the resurrection when to King Agrippa he said (Acts 26), “Why is it judged incredible with you, if God should raise the dead?” This class is living luxuriously and is careless of the future. Attention to affairs of the spirit is not popular in its circle. Its members smile superciliously at efforts of serious-minded believers to bring them face to face with reality. Paul in his great chapter on the resurrection (I Corinthians, fifteenth) intimates that with some at Corinth evil companionships were the explanation of doubt about the resurrection. He reviews the evidence for the resurrection of our Lord, and then proceeds to indicate inconsistency on the part of certain members of the Corinthian Church (“some among you”) in believing that our Lord rose, while at the same time doubting the possibility of resurrection of their own beloved dead. It would seem that these people were faced by indisputable evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, and at the same time were living such untrue lives as to be unsettled about the resurrection of their own dead! He earnestly warns them not to be deceived. “Evil communications,” says he, “corrupt good manners.”

The influence of great names coupled with faulty exegesis of Scripture is a powerful influence with the average person in the direction of practical denial of the resurrection, and consequent abandon to the free and easy life referred to by Paul when he says: “If we are found false witnesses . . . let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.” Professor Harnack in *What is Christianity?* declares that the New Testament itself distinguishes between the Easter message of the empty grave and the appearance of Jesus on the one side, and the Easter faith on the other. By the Easter faith he means that Jesus is alive, but the tomb was not opened, nor did Jesus appear “according to the Scriptures.” He asserts that, although the greatest value is attached in the Scripture

to that message, we are to hold the East faith even in its absence. In support, he tells us that the story of Thomas is given for the exclusive purpose of impressing us that we must hold the Easter faith even without the Easter message. “Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.” He further says that the disciples on the road to Emmaus were blamed for not believing, even though the Easter message had not yet reached them.

Is Professor Harnack a safe exegete of Scripture in these instances? Let us see. Is it not true (see John, twentieth chapter) that Thomas had already been given the Easter message by his fellow-disciples? They had told him that they had seen the Lord. He had already rejected the Easter message at the mouth of trustworthy friends and consequently was without the Easter faith. The Lord’s address to Thomas was substantially as follows, when we take into account the context: Thomas, you declined to accept the Easter message (the message of the empty tomb and of My appearances hitherto) as true on the word of your fellow-disciples. Blessed are those who do not reject this message of theirs, as you have done. While in this special instance I have met your demand for sight and touch, the method for the time to come will be that of belief of the message on testimony. I shall not make it a rule to appear in bodily form as I have done to you. The message of My rising from the dead will be carried by you and your fellow disciples who have seen Me. By that message the Easter faith will be created. On that message the Easter faith will rest. Your own testimony on this particular occasion will be recorded and read by multitudes in all parts of the world. It will be a great aid to their faith. It will even be the means of creating the Easter faith in many. It is for this reason that I have appeared to you. These things will be written that people everywhere in days to come may believe that I am the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they may have life in My name.

Turning to Luke, the twenty-fourth chapter, the thoughtful reader will there also take issue with Professor Harnack’s exegesis. He says

that “the two were blamed for not believing in the resurrection even though the Easter message had not reached them.” The fact is that Jesus did not blame them for this at all. He expressed surprise at their failure to grasp the Easter message in view of its presence in the Prophets. His words are: “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe [the Easter message] after all that the prophets have spoken! And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” Moreover they had already received the message. They spoke to Him of certain persons who had reported that the tomb was empty and Jesus was alive.

Surely Professor Harnack’s exegesis of the parts of the Gospels by Luke and John given above, does not conform to the canon of interpretation laid down by Bengel when he says: “An expositor should be like the maker of a well, who puts no water into the source himself, but makes it his object to let the water flow without diversion, stoppage or defilement.” We fain would ask Professor Harnack, in all earnestness, what he means by the Easter faith. He describes it in the words, “Jesus is alive.” In what sense is Jesus alive? Is it in the same sense in which Abraham is alive, or Paul, or Luther? If Jesus is not alive according to the Easter message, of what special value to me is the faith that He is alive.

Note in passing, the manner in which this twenty-fourth chapter of St. Luke puts Jesus into the Old Testament, including specifically His death, His resurrection on the third day, and the preaching of repentance and remission of sins in His name unto all the nations. The Old Testament is not brought into evidence in present-day apologetics as it deserves to be used. If we are not greatly mistaken, it will be coming back to its own soon.

How comes it to pass that honored leaders have gone to such lengths in their thinking as seriously to consider, and publicly to advocate, such a severance as that of the Easter faith from the Easter message? The explanation is believed to be found in the words of Henry

Robert Reynolds in the Introduction to his book on John the Baptist, where he says: “If in deference to the Zeitgeist, our religious leaders should recklessly surrender every position which is speciously assailed, in forgetfulness that the assault has been successfully repelled by those who have not lost heart, the cause of Christ will be for a period dishonoured, and a time of deep discouragement will prevail.”

The *spirit of the times* has already stampeded not a few into compromise with what they believe to be the demands of science. This has resulted in a surrender of positions supported by valid evidence and sound reasoning. However there are many who have not lost faith nor have they lost heart. These trust that in the days to come (may we not hope soon) the critical spirit will be replaced by the judicial temper, and that the scientific method will be employed wholly and not partially as is so often the case at present. Indeed already there are even among those who have caught and slain the nightingale, certain discerning spirits who have begun to lament the silence of the forest. We cannot have the Easter faith once the Easter message is gone. There is even now widespread evidence of the absence of the faith where the message has been rejected. The average man is usually consistent in his thinking.

Why do so many doubt or wholly reject the Easter message? This question is partly answered, I repeat, because the scientific method is not faithfully, persistently, and patiently employed in the matter. We need here not only to carry on. We need to *carry through*. Defining the scientific method in somewhat different terms from those already suggested (See Inductive Method in dictionary), we may say that it consists of exact observation, correct interpretation, rational explanation, and reasonable construction. We ought to add also, obedient application. Neptune is the outermost known planet of the solar system. It requires 164 years to make its journey around the sun! Its distance is 2,760,000,000 miles from the sun. It was discovered September 23, 1846, by Galle of Berlin. The discovery was made as the result of

calculations by Leverrier. Adams, an English astronomer, had previously made calculations which indicated the same result. *Neptune was located before discovered*. Neptune was located by the Inductive Method, which is another way of saying, by the Scientific Method. An effect was observed and an adequate cause for it was sought. The opinion is confidently ventured that if in the study of resurrection men would observe, interpret, explain, construct, and obey as faithfully as was done in locating and discovering the planet Neptune, they would find that the Easter faith, according to the Scriptures, is inseparable from the Easter message.

A question is in place here. Why, since the resurrection is such a transcendently important fact, if a fact, is it not so indisputably evidenced as to preclude all possibility of doubt on the part of anybody? We are sobered in our thinking by the consideration that were such the case, the moral as well as the intellectual significance of Christianity would be impaired. The programme of Christianity calls for belief on evidence rather than on explanation. This is the method of science. To chosen witnesses, and not to all the people, the Saviour appeared after His passion. He appointed a campaign of testimony for the days ahead. This is clear from His words to Thomas: “Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.” The next verses (John 20:30, 31) indicate the method by which belief is to be secured: “These things are written that ye may believe.”

Christianity certainly involves the development of the whole man. Its method is essentially scientific. Schiller of Oxford is right when he declares the identity of method in science and religion to be far more fundamental than the differences. Both call for action on probability, even on possibility. Both require experimentation. Both lead to certain knowledge through obedience to law. It is quite generally believed that a large element in true education consists of *ability to weigh evidence*. The scientific method calls for exact observation, correct description, and just valuation. This method would be uncalled for if the resurrection

of Christ were so attested that nobody could possibly doubt the fact. There is profound wisdom in what is involved in the words of the prophet (Isaiah 45:15): “Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.” There is supreme challenge to the intellectual and moral possibilities of mankind in Christianity’s method of approach to the race. Latham in *Pastor Pastorum* says: “If our Lord’s resurrection had been so attested that no sane person could doubt of the fact; if he had appeared in public and appalled Pilate on his judgment seat or Herod his throne, then, strange as it may appear, by the very fact of historic certainty being well established, the moral significance of the resurrection would be impaired. For, the acceptance of it would be independent of that which I have so often said is essential to religious belief, the concurrence of the free human will.”